

## Back Injuries

If you've ever suffered from a pulled muscle, sprain, charley horse, or backache, chances are you could have prevented it. More than 250,000 workers a year incur some kind of muscle injury. These are most often the result of using improper lifting methods, although climbing in and out of trucks, pushing heavy objects, or an awkward reach or bend can do the damage.

Your back is one part of the body that can never quite return to its former delicate structure after an injury, because repairs are rarely 100 percent effective. That's why it's so important to take precautions that can prevent the injury in the first place.

Let me repeat what I said at the start: The most common source of muscle ache and pain is poor lifting methods. One work injury out of four results from incorrect handling procedures or from using the wrong materials. When you straighten up after bending over, the muscles, vertebrae, ligaments, and discs in your back bear more than a quarter of a ton of strain. If you lift with your back at the same time, the weight of the object is multiplied 15 times.

Translated into lost time from work, such aches and pains cost millions of dollars a year, most of which is spent on pain killers in a futile search for relief. Because we bring most muscle aches and pains on ourselves, the best medicine is a dose of prevention.

Falls can also result in serious back injuries, so it's important to be cautious in the use of ladders and stairs, prompt in the cleanup of spilled material, and meticulous in keeping tripping hazards off walkways. The most important protection against back injuries, however, is knowing and following the techniques of safe lifting. Here they are:

- Make sure the path you'll be taking is free of obstructions or slipping hazards.
- Know your lifting ability and get help with heavy or awkward loads.
- Face the load you are trying to lift.
- Bend at the knees with your feet about 20 inches apart (approximately shoulders' width), one foot slightly ahead of the other.
- Grasp the load and gain control before you attempt the lift.
- Watch out for nails or other protrusions that could cause cuts or other types of injuries.
- Keep the load close to your body.
- Lift gradually with your legs, not your back; don't jerk the load.
- When you set the load down, watch for pinch points.

- To put the load down, just reverse the steps, lowering with your legs, placing your feet in the proper position, and keeping the load close to your body.

These reminders may help you on the job:

- Gear your activity to your age and physical condition. Physical exertion is an excellent body builder, but it should not be carried to excess. Stop and rest when you feel tired.
- When entering or leaving a truck cab, use the handgrips and make sure the step-ups are dry and clear.
- If you have a job that allows little movement, it is important to watch your posture and change your working position as often as you can. Don't become tense—rest the muscles that are constantly in use.

Take time each day to remind yourself of what you are doing. In short, use your head to save your back.

